

nations such as Bolivia and Argentina. Also, many of the school's graduates have lost their lives while combating the Narco-guerrillas and drug lords in Colombia and Peru.

These counterdrug operations are of vital interest to the safety and security of our Nation as the efforts of these brave Latin American soldiers are aimed at reducing the flow of drugs into the United States of America. This Member feels it would be a disservice to brand all the school's graduates as criminals because of the misdeeds of a very few.

The School of the Americas was established to heighten the professionalism of military establishments throughout Latin America. While the early focus of the institution during the Cold War was on combating Soviet-backed insurgencies, in recent years the school's emphasis has primarily shifted towards counterdrug operations to combat drug trafficking. The SOA curriculum also provides training in medical assistance, humanitarian and civil assistance, demining operations, peacekeeping operations, and most importantly human rights training.

One very positive result of the recent exposure of the school has been a much greater emphasis on human rights. They now expose every student at the school to a rigorous formal and informal training program on basic human rights. Specific classes and case studies are used to enhance the training and to make U.S. concerns unambiguously clear. The roles and rights of civilians, clergy, human rights observers, and U.N. personnel are integrated into the training program.

While the SOA has subsequently increased its emphasis on human rights, this Member believes that there is a basic value in encouraging young Latin-American military officers to study and train in the United States. An institution such as the SOA, which annually hosts 1,300 students from almost 20 countries, provides a level of professional training that is not otherwise available. Moreover, exposure to the U.S. lifestyle, values, and ideals offers important lessons for the future military leaders of Latin America.

There have been many false allegations in the past regarding the School of the Americas, such as the alleged existence of SOA torture manuals. This Member can assure my colleagues that there are no such manuals. This Member has contacted the Department of the Army, and the Department confirmed that such manuals do not exist. The SOA does not in any way engage in or endorse such heinous activities. Regarding the allegations that the SOA trains death squads and assassins, this Member can assure my colleagues that this is not true. The SOA is run by Officers of the United States Army that must operate the school in accordance with the governing regulations of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, and U.S. Public Law. Therefore, this Member can readily assure my colleagues that the SOA is not operating a training camp for death squads and assassins. The curriculum of the SOA is based on U.S. Military doctrine and practices, and uses the same materials from courses presented to U.S. military personnel. It is really outrageous that some people would tell such lies and sad that any Americans would believe such lies.

In April, a member of my staff traveled to Ft. Benning, Georgia, with a staff delegation from the House Committee on National Security on a fact finding tour of the SOA. The staff dele-

gation received a briefing on the entire curriculum currently being taught at the school. My staff member, with the aid of a translator, was able to engage in dialogue with a group of Latin American enlisted soldiers and asked questions about the type of training they were receiving from the SOA. The soldiers were from various countries such as El Salvador, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Columbia, Venezuela, and Mexico. My staff member noted that all of the soldiers were proud to have been chosen to represent their respective countries at the SOA. Many of these soldiers will return to their home and train other soldiers that could not attend the SOA in the proper application of U.S. military doctrine, human rights, and democracy. In addition, my staff member observed no improprieties in the training being given to students during the staff delegation visit. In fact, the School of the Americas readily welcomes both its proponents and opponents to visit the school to gain a better understanding of the type of programs being taught at the school.

While, this Member cannot guarantee that no graduate of the SOA will ever abuse human rights or undermine civilian government. What this Member can guarantee is that every effort will continue to be made to fully indoctrinate the students on respect for human rights and democracy at the U.S. Army School of the Americas. The training at this school undoubtedly does far, far more good to encourage appropriate human rights practices than any possible harm that could come from even a perversion of such an educational program some student might practice. This Member feels that it is really time for the congressional and religious opponents of the SOA to abandon this misguided attack on the SOA that misleads so many well-intentioned Americans who write their Senators and Congressmen.

#### IN HONOR OF OSCAR VIDAL BENITEZ

#### HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, June 10, 1998*

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Oscar Vidal Benitez, a true Cuban American hero and outstanding International Lions Club member.

In 1950, Mr. Benitez joined the Lion's Club in Bayamo, Cuba. Once in the club he set out to be a driving force in Lionism. By 1958 he was President of the local club and eventually he became Governor of an entire region of clubs in Cuba. He became well known for his work for the blind by becoming Director of the Rehabilitation for the Blind Program.

Like so many Cubans, he was forced to flee his homeland and settled in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area. Once in America, while attempting to adjust to his new country, he began his work for the Lion's Club almost immediately. In 1963 he founded and became President of the New York Lion's Club of Cubans in Exile. Mr. Benitez fought to get the club recognized by the International Lions Club and eventually the club branched out to form many active Lions Clubs in the metropolitan area.

Next, Oscar Vidal Benitez moved to Miami where he was founded and President of the

Miami Buena Vista Lions Club. In 1971, this club was recognized internationally for gaining one of the largest increases in membership in the world.

In total, Mr. Benitez is responsible for the founding of 15 Lions clubs in the United States and since joining the Lions in 1950, he has never missed a meeting. Mr. Benitez has been internationally recognized for his contributions to Lionism. He has received many President's and Governor's medals of appreciation, he was inducted by the International Board of Directors as a Life Member of Lions International and he has been honored as a Member of the World Humanitarian Fraternity Melvin Jones Fellowship on three separate occasions. Mr. Benitez has done an incredible job of spreading Lionism by starting new clubs, attracting new members and raising money for charity, but his most lasting contributions on behalf of the Lions Club may be his work with the blind.

Mr. Benitez is a life member of the Florida Lions Eye Bank Century Club and the Conklin Center for the Blind and he has received a Presidential Honor for his work with the Lions Home for the Blind, Inc. He is also the founder of the Home for the Blind Foundation which is now funded by Dade County.

On Wednesday, June 10, the West New York Lions Club will honor Oscar Vidal Benitez for his incredible contributions to Lionism and to the community. The West New York Lions Club is the largest in New Jersey and it traces its roots to the New York Lion's Club of Cubans in Exile which Mr. Benitez founded when he first came to the United States.

In closing I would like to thank Mr. Oscar Vidal Benitez for his outstanding work on behalf of the Lions Club. His work across two countries and three states will never be forgotten.

#### RECOGNIZING THE MORRIS ARCHITECTS

#### HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, June 10, 1998*

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I, Congresswoman JACKSON-LEE, submit the following document concerning the Congressional Recognition of Morris Architects.

#### CONGRESSIONAL RECOGNITION OF MORRIS ARCHITECTS

Whereas, Morris Architects was founded in 1938, S.I. Morris and Talbot Wilson sixty years ago, and;

Whereas, throughout the last sixty years, Morris Architects has served the city of Houston and the great state of Texas in fields of entertainment, government, education and health care architectural work and;

Whereas, Morris Architects have always been on the cutting edge of providing monumental landmarks and economic development throughout the United States and;

Whereas, the Alpha Kappa Omega Chapter has always maintained the highest level of excellence, evidenced by the more than sixty awards won by Morris Architects in the last twenty years, to establish a higher standard of life for the residents of Houston and the United States.

Now therefore, be it resolved that Morris Architects, a firm that has prospered